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Autism Task Force Bill Moves to Assembly Health Committee

by Mari Edlin (Guest Contributor)

State Sen. Elaine Alquist's (D-Santa Clara) bill to establish a telehealth task force for autism passed the Assembly's Human Services Committee yesterday with a unanimous vote. Both Republican committee members -- Brian Jones (Santee) and Shannon Grove (Bakersfield) -- abstained.

Having received bipartisan support in the Senate before reaching the Human Services Committee, the bill by the Santa Clara Democrat has now been double-referred to the Assembly Health Committee.

SB 1050 establishes a telehealth task force under the State Department of Developmental Services to develop evaluation and diagnostic procedures for autism and other autistic spectrum disorders. It is sponsored by The Children's Partnership, a national nonprofit, non-partisan, child advocacy group with offices in Santa Monica and Washington, D.C.

[The bill](#) is expected to result in a demonstration project to test the task force's recommendations. The pilot, targeting the underserved rural and inner city communities, would be developed by an academic institution, in conjunction with state regional centers and/or school districts.

The number of children with autism in California has tripled since 2002, according to state education figures released in February, 2011.

Senator Alquist's office is confident the bill will pass its next hurdle and said it did its homework by working closely with stakeholders and urging their participation. One of the concerns about SB 1050 has been potential cost pressures; however, the bill affirms that the task force will not require any expenditures from the general fund.

Jenny Kattlove, director of strategic health initiatives for The Children's Partnership, said that with the growing number of children with autism disorders, telehealth is an effective way to provide appropriate care to those who may not otherwise receive it -- especially children in rural areas with limited access to specialists.

The Children's Partnership is a strong advocate of technology and specifically of using telehealth in schools to augment health services. Research by the organization, in collaboration with Public Health Institute/Health Technology Center, is a testament to its commitment.

The research assesses how information technology can improve children's health and support planning initiatives to ensure that the right technologies are effectively deployed.

Kattlove said the task force would highlight best practices for using telehealth to meet the needs of children with autism and to identify potential policy barriers.

"The biggest policy barrier right now is that some telehealth services are not reimbursed. We need to ensure that all types of telehealth services are reimbursed by both public and private payers," she said.

"As technology transforms the health care system, its applications give us an opportunity to ensure that children are not left out of the conversation," Kattlove said.

Read more: <http://www.californiahealthline.org/capitol-desk/2012/6/autism-task-force-bill-moves-to-assembly-health-panel.aspx?p=1#ixzz1z2LIIEC6>